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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/11 and Security Council resolution 1917 (2010), in which the Council requested me to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including those of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and reviews the situation in the country since my previous report, of 14 September 2010 (A/65/552-S/2010/463), providing a summary of key political and security developments, including the national legislative elections, as well as regional and international events related to Afghanistan during the reporting period. The report also provides updates on a number of humanitarian, development and human rights activities carried out by the United Nations in Afghanistan. In addition, an update on the parliamentary elections was provided to the Security Council on 29 October 2010.

II. Political and security developments

Electoral developments

3. The elections for the Lower House of the National Assembly, the Wolesi Jirga, were held as planned on 18 September. After a series of exclusions and disqualifications, 2,506 candidates, including 396 women, contested 249 seats. Of the 6,835 polling centres initially planned, 938 were deemed unsuitable prior to the election, owing mostly to security concerns. An additional 397 polling centres did not open, or closed prematurely on polling day itself, owing either to insecurity or to

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difficulties in the delivery of polling materials. Thus, 5,500 polling centres opened on polling day.

4. Despite threats and violence by the Taliban and other illegal armed groups, approximately 4.3 million Afghans, out of an estimated 12 million eligible voters, turned out to vote. Although violence in certain parts of the country suppressed voter participation, the overall security situation on polling day showed no significant deterioration compared with that prevailing during last year's presidential election. There were more incidents, but the violence was less intense, and violence levels on polling day were consistent with patterns of increased violence observed over the course of the year. UNAMA recorded 32 civilian casualties on polling day.

5. After polling was completed, it became clear that there had been widespread fraud and irregularities across the country. The Independent Electoral Commission implemented fraud detection and correction measures, auditing and recounting votes from suspect polling stations and centres. Candidates suspected of having been involved in fraudulent practices, or on whose behalf fraud had taken place, were referred to the Electoral Complaints Commission. Prior to announcing the preliminary results, the Independent Electoral Commission investigated and audited/recounted votes from 6,813 polling stations (representing 38.39 per cent of the 17,744 stations opened on polling day). Of these, 2,543 stations were excluded.

6. The number of complaints filed with the Electoral Complaints Commission increased significantly following the announcement of preliminary results. The Commission received 5,860 complaints between polling day and three days after the announcement of the preliminary results (the deadline for filing polling-related complaints). Of these, 2,724 (47 per cent) were complaints of a serious nature that could have affected the election results. Those complaints had been processed and adjudicated by 15 November. Following the polling day, the Commission disqualified 27 candidates: 24 for having been involved in fraud and 3 for having failed to resign from Government positions. This brought to 118 the total number of candidates excluded for various reasons. The Commission also invalidated votes from 334 polling stations in 22 provinces. In total, the Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission excluded some or all of the votes from 2,891 polling stations. Altogether, 4,271,908 votes cast were deemed valid, while 1,330,782 ballots were invalidated and thus were not reflected in the results.

7. The thorough audit and recount process carried out by the Independent Electoral Commission meant that the announcement of preliminary results was postponed from 9 to 20 October. Given the large number of complaints submitted to the Electoral Complaints Commission, the announcement of the final certified results, originally slated for 30 October, was made only on 24 November, when the results for 33 provinces and the Kuchi constituency were published. The certification of results for Ghazni Province, where, despite the fact that it has a significant Pashtun population, only ethnic Hazaras were elected, was delayed on technical grounds until 1 December.

8. The electoral results brought about a significant shift in ethnic representation in the Wolesi Jirga. The number of seats held by Pashtuns was reduced by more than 20. This was due largely to insecurity centred in the south and the east, which resulted in a decreased number of polling stations and low voter turnouts in

predominantly Pashtun districts. It was also a result of fragmentation and the lower level of political organization among Pashtuns in ethnically mixed constituencies.

9. The final results caused some discontent in various quarters. Unsuccessful candidates were vocal in their criticism, organizing demonstrations in Kabul, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Herat, Khost and other parts of the country. The Office of the Attorney-General publicly expressed concern at some of the decisions taken by the electoral institutions and has opened a number of investigations. Both Afghan electoral institutions continue to emphasize that, while criminal cases against individuals can be a part of a transparent process, their decisions on electoral matters are final under law.

10. Statements by UNAMA, the European Union, the United States of America, Canada, Turkey and the Russia Federation welcomed the certification of the final results and expressed support for the work of the independent electoral bodies, while acknowledging that the process still requires improvement and calling for accountability in cases in which fraud had been detected and proved. It is widely perceived that these elections, held under an Afghan lead by the Independent Electoral Commission, showed significant technical improvement compared with previous polls. Furthermore, there was public support for the disqualification of some powerful figures as a result of electoral violations by the Electoral Complaints Commission.

11. Discussions have now begun on future United Nations support with a view to further consolidating the capacity of the electoral authorities, mainly the Independent Electoral Commission, and pursing long-term electoral reform. Donors have expressed their readiness to support such efforts. There is consensus that the reform process should be Afghan-led and supported politically by UNAMA and financially and technically by the international community, in particular the European Union.

Security situation

12. During the reporting period, the number of security incidents was 66 per cent higher than during the same period in 2009. Violent activities peaked on polling day and decreased thereafter. The violence on polling day, while high when measured in terms of the number of incidents, was characterized by widespread, low-level security incidents designed more to frighten potential voters than to kill. A common tactic was the launching of rockets and mortars against polling centres.

13. As during the previous reporting period, the focus of the Afghan National Security Forces and international military forces was on holding territory regained from anti-Government elements in Helmand Province over the summer and on continuing operations to gain control over Kandahar City. A high number of mid-level anti-Government elements continue to be killed or arrested as part of these operations, whose tempo and scope increased during the reporting period. Despite this pressure, anti-Government elements were able to sustain high levels of activity in areas into which they had recently expanded, particularly in the north and the north-east, where the international military presence is less dense.

14. Anti-Government elements continued to increase their use of improvised explosive devices and to directly target civilians through abductions and assassinations. Assassinations reached unprecedented numbers in August, targeting

largely civilians and police. Abductions of staff of non-governmental organizations also rose. A total of 134 non-governmental organization staff members were abducted by anti-Government elements between June and the end of October. In most cases, those captured were held for a short period before being released; however, one abducted national non-governmental organization worker was eventually killed by his captors.

15. Suicide attacks averaged three per week, targeting primarily international military forces, police and Government officials, particularly those considered to be actively opposed to the insurgency. Complex suicide attacks also continued, targeting primarily large, fortified international military bases. Civilian targets included a development agency in Kunduz, as well as the United Nations Multi-Agency Compound at Herat, the attack on which, carried out on 23 October, was the third suicide attack against the United Nations in the past three years. There were no staff casualties, and all attackers were killed before they could come near the office and residential buildings within the compound. Afghan security and law enforcement personnel reacted swiftly to the attack. They coordinated their efforts with the Mission's privately contracted international armed guards inside the compound to deter and eventually neutralize the attackers. In addition, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) promptly dispatched a helicopter to monitor the situation. The mitigating measures introduced following the 28 October 2009 attack on the Bakhtar guesthouse clearly helped to prevent casualties among United Nations staff. Nonetheless, the attack demonstrated the need to remain vigilant as well as to continue to adapt to a dynamic security environment in which some clearly consider the United Nations to be a target.

16. The fact that the Organization continues to be a target could be deduced from the upsurge in anti-United Nations rhetoric from insurgency media sources. These statements, appearing on Taliban websites and in Taliban publications, had ceased in the weeks before the elections but resumed after the elections. The prolongation of the ISAF mandate by the Security Council, and United Nations reporting on civilian casualties resulting from operations carried out by anti-Government elements, were provided as justifications for the attack against the United Nations in Herat.

17. On 6 December, the Ministry of the Interior announced that private security companies would be able to continue to operate in Afghanistan, although with some additional restrictions that principally prevent such companies from carrying out actions, such as roadblocks and searches, that are within the legitimate purview of national law enforcement agencies. That announcement effectively revised a 17 August presidential decree calling for the disbandment of all private security companies, both Afghan and international, by 17 December 2010.

18. The United Nations and other representatives of the international community in Afghanistan welcomed the spirit of the presidential decree but raised concerns about the timetable for its implementation. They feared that the disbandment of such companies before security could be assured by Afghan authorities would lead to a withdrawal of many development projects and activities, including international companies and banks, that are vital to Afghanistan's private and development sectors. A Joint Commission, chaired by the Ministry of the Interior and including representatives of the international community, led by the United States in close cooperation with the Senior Civilian Representative of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and ISAF, was established to find practical ways to meet the

President's objectives and address international concerns. The 6 December announcement will ensure the continuation of crucial international activities in support of the Government and Afghans in general. The President's fundamental concerns regarding the need for State institutions to eventually provide security for the country remain valid, however, and must continue to be addressed through the transition process.

Transition to Afghan responsibility for security

19. A major effort over the past year, since the inaugural speech of the President, Hâmid Karzai, in November 2009, has been the formulation of a framework under which full security responsibilities will be handed over to Afghan forces by 2014. At the 20 November 2010 meeting of ISAF Heads of State and Government on the margins of the NATO summit held in Lisbon, which I attended, the framework for the transition to Afghan leadership was endorsed. The process defines a clear path for the transition, based on the demonstration, on a province-by-province basis, that Afghan institutions can assume responsibility for security and governance, with a concomitant drawdown of international combat forces. The NATO Senior Civilian Representative should be commended for his outreach and inclusiveness towards the rest of the international community in formulating an integral strategic implementation plan or framework in cooperation with Government partners.

20. The United Nations will support the civilian aspects of this transition. UNAMA is reviewing the implications and opportunities of the process, including in the areas of governance and development. The Mission has prioritized the staffing and consolidation of its field offices to better support the transition. Finally, the United Nations country team is examining ways to support provincial authorities in building capacity to strengthen governance and enhance the delivery of essential services.

Peace and reintegration

21. A key outcome of the Consultative Peace Jirga, held from 2 to 4 June 2010 and described in my previous report, was the establishment by President Karzai of a High Peace Council at the request of the Jirga. The Council is mandated to promote peace and national unity through confidence-building, including the provision of political and strategic leadership to the Afghan peace and reintegration programme. The Council's 70 members include representatives of the major regional, ethnic, religious and political groups in Afghan society. There are 10 female members, as well as representatives of civil society organizations; 12 members are former officials of the Taliban regime.

22. President Karzai formally inaugurated the Council at its first meeting, held on 7 October. The President urged its members to generate ideas and proposals on how to initiate activities related to reconciliation. On 10 October, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani was approved as the Council's Chair. He will be supported by three Deputies: Abdul Hakim Mujahid, a former member of the Taliban regime; Mawlavi Attaullah Lodin, a prominent figure belonging to the Hezb-e Islami political party; and Asadullah Wafa, a public official and a current adviser to the President.

23. On 20 October, the High Peace Council called for all sides of the conflict to renounce violence and engage in talks. The Council also requested the United

Nations in particular to play a role in the process and to do more to gain and strengthen global support and commitments for the peace and stability process in Afghanistan. In a meeting between my Special Representative and members of the Council's Executive Committee on 31 October, it was agreed that UNAMA would establish an internal capacity to respond to specific requests from the Council for technical and practical assistance. It was agreed that the Salaam Support Group, established by my Special Representative with resources from UNAMA and donors willing to support reconciliation in general, would provide this capacity. Simultaneously, the High Peace Council asked the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to also provide support and facilitation. UNAMA is looking forward to engaging further with OIC in this process and welcomes the announcement that an OIC representative will soon be stationed in Kabul.

24. There have been increasing reports in the media of contacts between Government representatives and members of the armed opposition. The Taliban movement, however, has publicly denied involvement in contacts with the authorities and has rejected the idea of negotiations. Furthermore, on 29 September the Taliban released a statement claiming that the High Peace Council was an "impractical plan to deceive Afghans" and that it benefited foreigners. A written message dated 15 November and attributed to Mullah Omar again rejected the idea of talks and denounced reports of contacts as propaganda.

25. At the tactical level, several armed groups have approached the authorities and expressed their readiness to be disarmed and reintegrated. According to the joint secretariat of the Afghan peace and reintegration programme, up to 800 individuals in various provinces — in particular Badghis, Faryab, Herat and Kunduz — have presented themselves to the authorities as militants seeking to reconcile and reintegrate. Joint delegations, comprising representatives of ISAF, the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, and the National Directorate for Security, were dispatched to assess those requests, to record the individuals' biometric data and to register and collect weapons. Transitional assistance packages containing food and non-food items designed to provide the minimum level of support for a 90-day period were also provided. These signs of a willingness to give up fighting are encouraging, although it is too soon to conclude that they represent a significant trend. Moreover, there are questions as to whether all of the individuals who presented themselves were genuine militants or non-combatants responding to the incentives offered by the programme. Some of them are reportedly not affiliated with any of the main anti-government groups. The joint secretariat is working to verify the identity of the registered individuals to ensure that the programme works as designed.

Regional cooperation

26. During the reporting period, the regional policy of Afghanistan was centred on advancing political dialogue with neighbouring countries, with a focus on security and development cooperation. The Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular continued to engage each other at the highest level. On 15 and 16 September, President Karzai visited Pakistan, where he discussed the strengthening of bilateral cooperation with the President, Asif Ali Zardari, and the Prime Minister, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani. A major positive development resulting from this improved relationship was the ratification by the Pakistani Cabinet of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement on 6 October. The Agreement will regularize the approximately $2 billion in trade between the two countries and allow

Afghan goods to be transported through Pakistan and to be sold in regional and global markets.

27. The Governments of Afghanistan and Tajikistan discussed the expansion of cooperation in the areas of trade, agriculture and border security during a visit to Kabul by the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, on 25 and 26 October.

28. The Fourth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan was held in Istanbul from 2 to 4 November. This major event, which saw the participation of 27 countries and 14 international or regional organizations, reinforced commitments undertaken by Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community with regard to economic cooperation. The Conference process has grown in size and importance since it was launched in 2005. The Third Conference was held in Islamabad in May 2009, and those gathered in Istanbul noted the significant progress that had taken place since then. The Conference resulted in recommendations on priority investment areas, with focus placed on the development of regional roads and railways; the extractive mine industry; donor support for the implementation of the Transit Trade Agreement; and the harmonization and upgrading of customs and transport infrastructure. Furthermore, regional economic cooperation deliverables that would benefit both Afghanistan and its neighbours were identified for consideration by regional and international partners. The secretariat of the Conference is the Centre for Regional Cooperation, housed in the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the effective preparation of the Conference demonstrated the Ministry's increased capacity. A business forum and an academic platform were convened at Bosphorus University as side events to the Conference. In that context, I would like to recognize and welcome the constructive role played by Turkey in facilitating and advancing regional engagement in Afghanistan.

29. The fourth meeting of the Kabul Silk Road initiative was held on 27 November 2010 in Kabul. The initiative had been launched by my Special Representative earlier in the year to facilitate informal dialogue among the Government, UNAMA and Kabul-based Ambassadors of Afghanistan's neighbours on ways and means to promote regional cooperation for Afghanistan. The meeting coincided with the visit of the recently appointed Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov. Mr. Fedotov briefed meeting participants on progress being made under cooperation initiatives sponsored by the Office and on the overall conceptual thinking of the Office on cross-border cooperation in the wider region.

30. The Afghan Minister of Economy, Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, took part in a session of the Heads of Government Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, held in Dushanbe on 25 November. Minister Arghandiwal said that Afghanistan would continue to take persistent actions against terrorism and extremism, and requested that Afghanistan be granted full membership in the organization.

III. Transition to greater Afghan leadership: progress in the follow-up to the Kabul Conference and the implementation of the Kabul process

31. Since the International Conference on Afghanistan, held in Kabul on 20 July, the Government has demonstrated its determination to implement the road map defined at the London and Kabul conferences, known as the Kabul process. The fifteenth meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, held on 15 November, provided the Government with an opportunity to present its first 100-day progress report on the implementation of the commitments undertaken at those conferences. According to the Government, more than 70 per cent of the October 2010 target benchmarks had been met. This performance demonstrated the Government's growing capacity to assume ownership of and responsibility for Afghanistan's transition and development.

32. A key element of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting was the presentation by the Government of a monitoring and reporting framework to track progress made in relation to each of its 22 priority programmes. The framework provides the Government, for the first time, with a management tool to measure delivery against its existing commitments and to identify, at an early stage, obstacles to progress on any given programme. The framework will also enhance the transparency and accountability of the Government's activities for the Afghan people. The Government noted that, with the establishment of the new monitoring tool, its focus would shift from programme design and planning to implementation and delivery. This reporting system will, finally, facilitate a fact-based policy dialogue between the Government and the international community on the implementation of the Kabul process.

33. Since my previous report, the most obvious results of the Government's work have been related to the development of implementation plans for the short and mediums terms for all 22 national priority programmes aimed at ensuring the timely delivery of services to the Afghan people. The first programme finalized, costed and presented to donors was that designed to strengthen public finance management. The Government was also able to report that it had exceeded the London and Kabul conference targets on increasing the size of both the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Other progress, in the field of governance in particular, has included the adoption of anti-corruption action plans in selected line ministries, the drafting of anti-corruption and audit laws, and the Cabinet's approval of a line in the State budget for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, which had previously been funded entirely by international donations.

34. The "cluster" mechanism for the rationalization of ministerial work continued to be a central vehicle for enhanced cross-ministerial coordination and collaboration, guiding overarching policy development in the areas of security, governance and social and economic development, which involve the work of several Ministries. While the human resources development and agriculture and rural development clusters remained unchanged, the infrastructure and economic development cluster has been divided into the infrastructure cluster and the private sector development cluster. Similarly, the governance cluster has been divided into one cluster on public administration, led by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, and another on the rule of law, led by the Minister of Justice. The

security cluster, under the overall leadership of the Minister of Defence, has been divided into two subgroups, covering security, and peace and reintegration.

35. The governance cluster has completed its action plan, which includes key provisions relating to the development of a medium-term fiscal framework to prioritize expenditures and domestic revenues, as well as a strategy for the reinvigoration of the public administration reform, the revision of the Civil Service Law and the acceleration of the implementation of the pay and grade reform.

36. Access to justice has been improved with the opening of Ministry of Justice legal aid offices in several provinces and the expansion to new regions of services offered by non-governmental organization legal aid providers. The recent agreement on the part of donors to the Law and Order Trust Fund to support increases in the salaries of prison officers to bring them up to par with those of police officers in 2011 is expected to reduce the attrition of prison staff.

37. The Government has begun discussions with international partners on their current and planned financial commitments as part of the preparation of the next fiscal year's budget, reminding them of their commitment to progressively channelling 50 per cent of their development assistance through the Afghan budget and to aligning 80 per cent of it with Government priorities. The Government has provided detailed criteria and guidance for donor activities financed outside the Afghan budget, to ensure that they are consistent with the development priorities of Afghanistan.

IV. Aid coherence

38. UNAMA, in fulfilment of its mandate, has taken on a greater role in generating a coherent approach to donor assistance in support of the Afghan Government's anti-corruption agenda. In particular, it has assumed the duties of Co-Chair of the International Community Transparency and Accountability Working Group and Chair of the United Nations Donor Group in Support of the High Office of Oversight. The Working Group focuses on assisting the appropriate Government institutions in implementing anti-corruption strategies, accelerating the verification and publication of asset declarations, and enhancing the effectiveness of civil service appointments. The Donor Group was established to ensure an increasingly harmonized approach to donor assistance, specifically that provided to the High Office of Oversight, a central Government institution that plays an essential role in fighting corruption.

39. Supporting the coordination of development activities at the subnational level is an increasing priority for UNAMA. This effort has three key elements. The first is ensuring that activities at the subnational level are consistent with and linked to national priorities set by the Government. The second is advocating and promoting communication and coordination among development actors at the provincial level, including civil-military activities undertaken by provincial reconstruction teams. The third and most critical element is supporting local authorities in assuming leadership for the coordination of development activities within their subnational jurisdictions (provinces, municipalities and districts), including through the identification of provincial priorities and gaps through sector working groups, as well as through provincial development councils chaired by provincial governors. The alignment of provincial reconstruction teams, donors and other implementing

partners with these Government-led processes will be essential, in particular as Afghan institutions assume greater practical authority as part of the transition process. The strengthening and expansion of UNAMA field offices, and greater coordination among United Nations partners through the development of the Integrated Strategic Framework, which is currently under way, are key steps towards the Mission's effective delivery on its development coordination mandate.

V. Humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development

40. The continuing deterioration of the security situation has inhibited the implementation of development projects and limited access for humanitarian activities. The effects of the ongoing conflict have, however, increased the demand for humanitarian assistance. Late in November, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched the 2011 Afghanistan Consolidated Appeals Process, which is based on the following priorities: (a) the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection to populations affected by conflict and natural disasters; (b) response to humanitarian needs resulting from situations of chronic vulnerability; and (c) the development of contingency planning and disaster preparedness for recognized hazards. The 2011 Appeal is currently 66 per cent funded, albeit with notable gaps in critical sectors, and further support for underfunded priority projects, in particular in the areas of education and water and sanitation, is urgently needed.

41. During the reporting period, 11,642 Afghan refugees returned with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), bringing to 112,542 the total number of assisted Afghan refugee returns since the beginning of 2010. During the same period, some 1,570 individuals returned from flood-affected regions of Pakistan (mainly Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province) and received additional assistance upon arriving in Afghanistan, bringing to 4,714 the total number of flood-affected Afghans assisted upon returning to their country since the floods began in Pakistan.

42. The Afghanistan return operation remains the single largest such operation for UNHCR. Difficult economic conditions and alleged harassment, as well as fear of arrest and deportation in countries of asylum, have been cited as key factors in the decision to return. More positively, improvements in security in some parts of Afghanistan, employment opportunities, UNHCR assistance packages and the Government's land allocation schemes have also been cited as reasons for returning by those interviewed.

43. A total of 7.8 million children under 5 years old from Afghanistan's 34 provinces were immunized during the National Immunization Days organized for the polio eradication campaign, which was conducted between 3 and 5 October 2010. In addition, 4.6 million children between the ages of 2 and 5 were administered de-worming tablets. The campaign took place in spite of the extremely challenging security situation, especially in Badghis Province. Through local elders, district public health authorities were able to obtain safe-passage guarantees from local Taliban forces so that they could carry out the campaign.

44. Through the Consolidated Appeals Process, the World Food Programme (WFP) has appealed to donors for urgently needed funding to meet a food shortfall amounting to 103,600 tons for the period up to June 2011, at a cost of $157 million.

WFP aims to reach more than 6.8 million vulnerable Afghans with general food distribution and targeted interventions. To date, only 16 per cent of the funding requirements for the current three-year programme have been met. Current shortfalls affect all programmes, including school feeding, training and vocational initiatives and the food-for-work programme. If additional support cannot be obtained, WFP will have to cut planned food distribution activities throughout Afghanistan. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has undertaken planning for the coming winter, procuring and pre-allocating 30,000 winterization packages in Kabul and in the organization's eight sub-offices, in Gardez, Jalalabad, Fayzabad, Kunduz, Mazar i Sharif, Bamyan, Herat and Kandahar. By the end of 2010, IOM expects to have distributed flood and winterization kits to approximately 80,000 families, or 480,000 individuals.

45. IOM is also active in developing the capacity of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority in the north and is assembling an emergency contingency stock for 2011.

46. Under the mine action programme, emergency response teams are now available in all but one of the country's seven regions. Since it became operational in the most recent quarter, the programme has responded to 21 emergency requests for demining. Additionally, mine-clearance activities have opened up land for the new Afghan railway system now under construction in the north and the west.

47. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with other relevant United Nations agencies, is finalizing its National Education Support Strategy for Afghanistan. The Strategy defines United Nations support for the National Education Strategic Plan, for the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, and for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Education for All initiative. In addition, UNESCO and the Ministry of Education have jointly launched the Needs and Rights Assessment on Inclusive Education in Afghanistan as part of a pilot project in 29 schools in Kabul to support the development of methodologies for teaching children with disabilities.

48. A two-day retreat of the United Nations country team's gender working group, held on 20 and 21 October, identified United Nations strategic priorities on gender equality, in line with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and Government priorities. Over the next three years, key areas of focus will be: (a) promoting women's participation in the implementation of the Afghanistan peace and reintegration programme, including providing support to and developing the capacities of the nine women members of the High Peace Council, and promoting the inclusion of women in the peace process; (b) continuing to support the Ministry of Women's Affairs in implementing its Priority Programme; and (c) ensuring the incorporation of gender considerations into the Integrated Strategic Framework.

49. The economic empowerment of women is a critical aspect of reducing maternal mortality, which has been identified as an urgent priority by the United Nations country team. Since September, more than 195,000 Afghans — most of them women — have participated in WFP vocational skills training programmes. Furthermore, under the backyard poultry project of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 7,000 poultry packages were distributed to rural women in seven districts in 2010.

VI. Counter-narcotics

50. In September, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime released the results of its annual Afghan Opium Poppy Survey. The Survey found that opium poppy cultivation had remained at 2009 levels, in 2010, while opium production had declined by half. According to the summary findings, a significant share of poppy cultivation continued to occur in the insecure southern and western provinces of the country. Cultivation in Kandahar jumped 30 per cent to 25,835 hectares (63,838 acres), suggesting that opium cultivation increases along with insecurity. The cultivation in the province of Helmand alone accounted for 53 per cent of total opium cultivation in Afghanistan. All 20 poppy-free provinces remained poppy-free in 2010, while four additional provinces (Kunar, Laghman, Zabul and Herat) were nearly poppy-free. The gross, per-hectare income of opium farmers increased by 36 per cent to $4,900 from $3,600 last year. By comparison, the gross per-hectare income derived from wheat declined from $1,200 in 2009 to $770 in 2010.

51. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime hosted a Paris Pact expert round table on "Afghanistan and neighbouring countries" in Vienna in October 2010. Thirty-two countries and eight regional organizations participated. Key recommendations included: (a) increasing political, financial and technical support provided to Afghanistan and neighbouring countries for regional cooperation; (b) enhancing regional intelligence-sharing mechanisms through the establishment of a fully operational Central Asia regional information centre in Almaty and a joint planning cell in Tehran, and expanding border liaison offices; (c) improving the coverage of services for drug users; and (d) investing in drug-dependence treatment as a cost-effective alternative to criminal justice sanctions for the many children in the region exposed to drug use. Among other issues agreed upon, it was decided that the Paris Pact would continue to support the coordination of precursor control.

52. The fourth ministerial meeting of the Triangular Initiative was held in Islamabad under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, with an agenda of promoting cooperation among Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in counter-narcotics and border management in drug control efforts. The Minister of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan, Zarar Ahmad Moqbel Osmani; the Secretary-General of the Drug Control Headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mostafa Mohammad Najjar; and the Federal Minister for Narcotics Control of Pakistan, Arbab Muhammad Zahir, adopted measures to strengthen their cooperation in addressing drug trafficking and agreed to establish additional border offices to increase cooperation among law enforcement officials. The Ministers committed to expanding the work of the joint planning cell in Tehran, which is aimed at the sharing of information on illicit drug trafficking. Agreement was also reached on the organization of more joint patrolling operations in the border areas of the three countries. In addition, the Ministers agreed to enhance legal cooperation in drug-related matters.

53. Another counter-narcotics regional initiative was a meeting, in accordance with the Dubai Process March 2009 action plan, of representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, held in Kabul on 13 and 14 November. Joint working groups on customs and law enforcement met to advance the commitments identified at the Dubai meeting and developed at subsequent meetings. The meeting was chaired by a representative of the Government of Canada, with attendance by international experts from the United Nations Office on

Drugs and Crime, the World Bank, the Asia Foundation, the Border Management Task Force, the United States Agency for International Development, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, ISAF, NATO, IOM and UNAMA.

54. One element of the Rainbow Strategy, aimed at the interdiction of chemical precursors for the production of heroin and launched under Operation TARCET II (Targeted Anti-trafficking Regional Communication, Expertise and Training initiative), ended recently. The most recent interdiction under TARCET II resulted in the seizure of the following amounts of acetic anhydride: 1,630 kg, in Afghanistan; 383 kg, in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and 21,000 kg, in Pakistan. Operation TARCET III began in September 2010.

VII. Human rights

55. Civilians continued to bear the brunt of intensified armed conflict as civilian casualties, including deaths and injuries, increased by 20 per cent in the first 10 months of 2010 compared with the same period in 2009. UNAMA documented a preliminary figure of 6,215 conflict-related civilian casualties during this period, including 2,412 deaths and 3,803 injuries. More than three quarters of all civilian casualties were linked to anti-Government elements reflecting an increase of 25 per cent over the same period in 2009. At the same time, the number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-Government forces decreased by 18 per cent compared with the first 10 months of 2009.

56. Anti-Government elements were responsible for the deaths and injuries of 4,738 civilians (or 76 per cent of the total number of civilian casualties) during the reporting period. Suicide and improvised explosive device attacks caused the most civilian casualties attributed to anti-Government elements, resulting in 998 deaths (55 per cent of the civilian deaths attributed to anti-Government elements) and 2,062 injuries (70 per cent of the civilian injuries attributed to anti-Government elements). During the same period, UNAMA recorded 742 civilian casualties (or 12 per cent of the total number of civilian deaths and injuries) attributed to pro-Government forces. Aerial attacks caused the largest number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-Government forces, including 162 deaths (42 per cent of the civilian deaths attributed to pro-Government forces) and 120 injuries (34 per cent of the civilian injuries attributed to pro-Government forces).

57. Anti-Government elements continued their intimidation campaign against supporters or persons perceived to be supporters of the Afghan Government and the international community. UNAMA recorded 403 assassinations and executions and 219 abductions of civilians during the reporting period. Compared with the same period in 2009, the number of civilians assassinated or executed by anti-Government elements in 2010 surged by more than 107 per cent. More than half of all civilian assassinations were carried out in southern Afghanistan.

58. In its report entitled "Harmful traditional practices and implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan", released on 9 December, UNAMA found that widespread child marriage, forced marriage (including the giving away of girls to resolve conflicts), restrictions on their movement outside the home and "honour" crimes were violating the rights of Afghan women and girls. The report's findings highlighted the fact that the full

implementation of the Law by the Government across the country offered the best prospects for protecting women from these violent and discriminatory practices.

59. Civil society networks increased their advocacy efforts to ensure inclusiveness and openness in the peace, reintegration and reconciliation process. Civil society organizations reiterated their appeals to the Government to review the membership of the High Peace Council and to remove members accused of human rights violations and war crimes. Women's groups, in a statement issued on 4 October, called for increased representation of women on the Council (only 10 per cent of its members are women).

60. On 10 November, the Civil Society and Human Rights Network, the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Open Society Foundations office in Afghanistan, in collaboration with UNAMA, held a conference on "Justice and reconciliation". Representatives of civil society and Government officials from the Afghan peace and reintegration programme and the High Peace Council discussed specific measures to strengthen consultation between the Government and civil society on matters related to peace, justice and reconciliation. Civil society groups issued a statement containing nine recommendations to the Government and the international community, which included the formation of a consultative working group to facilitate the inclusion of civil society in the peace process, the creation of a justice process to complement reconciliation initiatives, and the establishment of a truth-seeking mechanism. They also reiterated calls to make the peace and reintegration process more transparent and to review the composition of the High Peace Council to ensure increased representation of civil society, women and minorities.

61. As part of its country-wide detention-monitoring strategy, UNAMA has been examining the treatment of detainees in a number of the detention facilities of the National Directorate for Security and the Ministry of Justice. The programme is monitoring the extent to which Afghan authorities provide detainees with humane treatment and respect fair-trial guarantees during the pretrial incarceration phase. During its visits to detention facilities, UNAMA received reports of cases of the severe abuse and ill-treatment of detainees by Afghan authorities, in which basic procedural protections had not been respected, in violation of Afghan and international laws.

VIII. Mission support/operational issues

62. The agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Kuwait to formally establish a UNAMA Support Office in Kuwait was signed on 28 November 2010. The Support Office will enable the Mission to ensure the continuous backup of its critical data and to maintain vital technical and administrative functions in a secure environment. It will also serve as a relocation centre in the event of an in extremis situation in Afghanistan.

63. On 4 October 2010, UNAMA signed an agreement with the Government of the Netherlands to transfer the Alpha compound to the United Nations by 1 November. The move into both office and residential accommodations in the compound had been completed by the end of November 2010. The new compound, located in the centre of Kabul, provides workspace and residential accommodations for up to 70 international staff members and workspace for an additional 80 national staff.

64. The 23 October attack on the compound in Herat, which is managed jointly by the United Nations Office for Project Services and UNAMA, underscores the importance of security enhancements under way in all of the Mission's regional and provincial offices. In Kandahar, the Government has identified land to be given to UNAMA free of charge, and plans to build a new compound in that location are well under way. The 2011 budget provides for the construction of new, security-enhanced compounds in Bamyan, Kunduz and Mazar i Sharif, along with the continuing programme of additional upgrades in other locations, as recommended by the Department of Safety and Security.

65. The moving of many substantive staff from the United Nations Operations Centre in Afghanistan, located outside Kabul, to the Alpha compound in the centre of the city, as well as the moving of 39 technical and administrative staff to the UNAMA Support Office in Kuwait, has provided additional secure accommodation units in Kabul. The continuing programme of security enhancements in the regional and provincial offices has also begun to make available additional secure accommodation units in the field offices. However, security risks outside the compounds remain high, and much work must still be done on the compounds themselves to improve their security. In some locations, such as Kandahar, this will require the development of new compounds.

66. The recruitment of new staff for the Mission has improved. A turnover rate of 30 per cent, however, means that constant recruitment activity must be maintained. The overall vacancy rate for international staff as at 30 November 2010 was 36 per cent, reflecting a gradual improvement over the year owing to intensive recruitment efforts by the Mission.

IX. Observations

67. The Kabul process is the road map agreed to by the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners to create conditions in which Afghans can become fully in charge of their Government, their security and their economic development. The transition to full Afghan leadership and ownership, and the development of the capacity to deliver practical results to the Afghan population, require a strong partnership between the Government and the international community. To support the implementation of the Kabul process, it is critical that the international community be fully committed to aligning its assistance with the Government's policies and priorities. It is equally critical that this partnership be based on dialogue. The strengthened Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board mechanism will provide a key platform for policy dialogue, including with civil society and the private sector, to ensure follow-up, regular engagement and, above all, action on our mutual commitments. The Afghanistan meeting held during the NATO summit in Lisbon reaffirmed strong international support for the transition, which should ultimately balance Afghans' need for peace with justice and the international community's strong interest in securing regional stability and eliminating the threats of extremism.

68. The partnership between the international community and the Government must be flexible and adapt to needs and conditions on the ground. As the process of the transition to full Afghan leadership and ownership advances, both the Government and the international community should be guided by realities rather

than schedules. Only if it is based on tangible improvements in governance, security and development will the process be convincing to the Afghan people, who are its primary stakeholders.

69. While governance, security and economic growth are strengthened under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, efforts must continue to end the conflict and create the foundations for a sustainable peace through political dialogue. This process will continue to pose significant challenges, which can be overcome only with the sustained support of all stakeholders, including the Government and neighbouring and troop-contributing countries, and the leadership of armed opposition groups. Most important, it will require the backing of a unified population. The United Nations stands ready to support this Afghan-led process — logistically, materially and technically — if the major stakeholders agree. UNAMA is setting up a mechanism, the Salaam Support Group, with a latent capacity to provide such support at the appropriate time.

70. Although these challenges should not be underestimated, there is an increasing sense that conditions for reconciliation are becoming more favourable and that there may soon be a real opportunity for a political dialogue leading to a settlement. All sides will need to make efforts and compromises to reach such a political settlement. However, any political settlement must respect the Afghan Constitution and must not undermine the real achievements made in recent years, especially in the areas of human rights and democratization.

71. Further efforts will also be required in terms of regional cooperation. Continued dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is needed to deepen political, economic and security relationships that benefit both countries. Trade policy liberalization, including the modernization of customs procedures, and transport infrastructure development are needed to capitalize on the momentum already achieved in the areas of trade and transit. In the energy sector, reaching power purchasing and trade agreements with neighbouring countries — and building on the growing strength of Afghanistan's private sector — would also give impetus to Afghanistan's industrial development. Opportunities for renewable power-generation, including hydropower and thermal power, should be further explored if Afghanistan is to fulfil its economic potential. Investment in the building of Afghan capacity for regional cooperation will expedite the process of the country's integration into regional economic and trade arrangements. In this regard, the growing capacity of the Centre for Regional Cooperation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a positive development and a demonstration of the Government's increasing capacity to shape its own development agenda.

72. There is also scope for enhanced cooperation in the area of counter-narcotics. This could include increased information-sharing on intelligence and the coordination of efforts to interdict drugs and precursor materials. Border control and management pose additional challenges requiring improved law enforcement capabilities. The United Nations system has been active in this regard, delivering its assistance in a coordinated manner. The United Nations will continue to address the enduring problem of illegal narcotics, as underlined by the recent visit to Kabul by the new Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov.

73. The electoral process was far from flawless, but the Afghan electoral institutions are to be commended for their independence and integrity, and for

having accomplished the logistical feat of organizing such a complicated operation in a difficult political, security and geographic environment. Given the shift in ethnic representation that disfavours the Pashtun community, the election results have understandably raised political concerns among some parties within Afghanistan. That shift, however, is more the result of insecurity in certain areas of the country than of flaws in the electoral process itself. Addressing these concerns is therefore a political task and must not undermine the independence of the electoral institutions. In particular, Afghan law enforcement bodies, while exercising their legitimate functions, need to ensure that institutional boundaries are respected and that political processes are not inappropriately criminalized.

74. Continued support for the Independent Election Commission and a comprehensive lessons learned exercise are at the forefront of the activities of the United Nations Development Programme Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (UNDP=ELECT) project prior to its winding down in March 2011. The international community, together with donors and Afghan partners, needs to continue the pursuit of a long-term electoral reform and future United Nations support to sustain and further build the capacity of the electoral institutions. Initial talks on both of these issues have already begun, and donors have expressed their readiness to contribute to these efforts. Negotiations to initiate the electoral reform process should start as soon as possible, before the interest of stakeholders withers. The process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, with political support from UNAMA and technical and financial support from other international organizations, and possibly a significant role for the European Union.

75. The security of United Nations staff remains a major concern for the Organization, and the October attack against the United Nations compound in Herat served as a reminder of the dangers that our staff face. I express particular gratitude to two Member States whose generosity has allowed the United Nations to mitigate security threats. The Government of Kuwait, by providing the Kuwait Support Office, has allowed UNAMA to redeploy to Kuwait some staff carrying out support functions whose presence is not necessary in Afghanistan. That has made available more safe residences for staff whose presence in Afghanistan is essential. The Government of the Netherlands has made available to the United Nations at a generous rate the compound that it had built in the centre of Kabul, adding additional safe residences and reducing the risk to staff whose work is carried out mostly in the city.

76. Finally, I thank my Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, the staff of UNAMA and all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, national and international, who continue to represent the highest aspirations of the Organization by working with diligence and dedication, at personal risk and discomfort, for a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.